Ward McAllister, Once the City's Petronius

Man Who Named New York's "400" Had Soul of Rome's Social Arbiter

Recollections of One Who Ranks With Beau Nash, Vatel and Brummell

By ARTHUR B. MAURICE.

He does not reign in Russia cold,
Nor yet in far Cathay,
But o'er this town he's come to hold
An undisputed sway.

When in their might the ladies rose,
"To put the Despot down,"
As blandly as Ah Sin, he goes
His way without a frown.

Alas! though he's but one alone,
He's one too many still—
He's fought the fight, he's held his own,
And to the end he will.

—*From a Lady After the Ball of February* 25, 1884.

WARD McALLISTER
WHO FIRST NAMED THE "FOUR HUNDRED"

MRS. BURTON HARRISON, in "Recollections, Grave and Gay," told of a visit made in 1892 as one of a party of invited guests travelling by special train to the newly built Four Seasons Hotel at Cumberland Gap, in Tennessee, where the directors of a new land company and health resort scheme had arranged a week of sports and entertainment.

About forty congenial persons from New York and Washington made the trip, the mountaineers and their families along the route assembling at stations to see the notabilities among them. The chief attraction, Mrs. Harrison recorded, seemed to be Ward McAllister, who had been expected, but did not go.

At one station James Brown Potter, engaged in taking a constitutional to remove train stiffness, was pointed out by another of the party to a group of staring natives as the famous arbiter of New York fashion

"I want to know," said a gaunt mountain horseman. "Wal, I've rid fifteen miles a purpus to see that dude McAllister, and I don't begrutch it, not a mite."

Yokels Moved by Curiosity.

All over the land there were yokels and the spouses of yokels and even the children of yokels, moved by a like interest and curiosity, while rural visitors to New York, and also New Yorkers born, for that matter—if such a person as a born New Yorker actually existed—craned their necks from the tops of the Fifth avenue buses in the hope of catching a glimpse of the great man, who, for a brief, flitting moment was an institution of as much importance as the Obelisk or the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

But so far as the great world beyond the Weehawken Hills went, Ward McAllister's was an ephemeral glory. It was a clear case of anachronism. He was born 100 years too late, or 200 years, or 2,000. His was the soul of the Roman Petronius, or of one of the Corinthian eccentrics, who strutted in St. James's Park or past Carlton House in the early days of the Regency.

In the Carlton House circle he might have out-Brummelled Brummell and supplanted that famous Beau as the object of the fat Prince's attentions and ingratitude. Indeed, there was a flavor of Brummell's biting insolence in some of the sayings that were attributed to the New Yorker. For example, there was a well known literary woman of New York who had in some way incurred the arbiter's august disapproval.

"She write stories of New York society!" he said. "Why, I have seen her myself buying her Madeira at Park & Tilford's in a demijohn."

Fame Through the Newspapers.

Fame came to him through the newspaper reporter. It was a smaller New York, a more limited Fifth avenue, in those days, and Mrs. Astor ruled its society without any one to question her sovereignty. She was about to give a great ball, and Ward McAllister, as the self-appointed and generally accepted secretary of society, was in charge of the list of invitations.

To the reporter sent to interview him Mr. McAllister explained that, owing to problems of space, only 400 cards were to be sent out, commenting: "After all, there are only 400 persons in New York who count in a social way."

"And who are those 400 persons?" asked the quick witted reporter.

On that point Mr. McAllister was more reticent. But the reporter obtained the list of those who were to be invited to the ball, and the names were printed as those who constituted New York's "Four Hundred."

After all, whether it was part pose, or whether the man was quite sincere in his professed belief in the profound importance of what most of the world is inclined to regard as trivialities, he was always consistent. As a youth he went to live in the house of a relative, in Tenth street, New York, when that neighborhood retained a flavor of aristocracy. A legacy of $1,000 fell to him. It was his first legacy.

A cannier soul would have made the money go a long way. He spent it all for the costume that he was to wear at the fancy dress ball that was to be given by Mrs. John C. Stevens at her residence in College place. "I flattered myself that it was the handsomest and richest costume at the ball."

A little later, in 1850, he went to San Francisco, to join his father in the practice of law. His talents as a giver of dinners were in evidence at that early age, and his father made use of them in connection with the law business.

"Such dinners as I gave I have never seen surpassed anywhere," he complacently recorded in later years.

Some one spoke to the elder McAllister of the admirable manner in which his son kept house.

"Yes," was the sapient retort. "He keeps everything but the Ten Commandments."

Two years of California and then he returned East, whence he went to Europe. The record he preserved of that journey gives a marvellous picture of the man.

In London he met a Californian, in with all the sporting world, on intimate terms with the champion prizefighter of England, the Queen's pages and the Tattersalls crowd. Chaperoned by this curious countryman, McAllister's first introduction to London life took the form of a dinner at a great house in the suburbs.

It was a strange house and a strange company, more in keeping with the eighteenth century than the middle of the nineteenth. The rat pit, the drawing of the badger, the bloody battling of the bull terriers, the high betting, the Gargantuan eating and drinking and shouting, the smashing of glasses and plates, the imperturbable footmen in green and gold liveries calmly replacing in their chairs the guests overcome by strong potations—it was a picture for Hogarth's pencil at its best or Gillray's at its craziest.

The intimation is that, in the course of this and similar adventures, McAllister was defraying his own expenses and those of his California companion. Provided it was the kind of life he wanted to see, it was money well spent.

Then he went off to Windsor, and there, at the village inn, dined with her Majesty's chef and the keeper of the jewel room. Again it was probably the visitor from across the seas who gave the dinner, as a result of which he was permitted to visit the royal kitchen and see the roasts turning on the spits.

Having exhausted England, the young discoverer travelled to Paris and thence to Florence. There are believed to be a few art galleries in Florence and some monuments of historical interest. But about these Lochinvar did not disturb his head greatly. Instead he discovered a cook—"I paid the fellow twenty-four Pauls a day"—whose manner of roasting a turkey was most extraordinary.

He cultivated the English doctor of the city and through him procured invitations to the balls given by the Grand Duke of Tuscany. The King of Bavaria attended one of these balls, and something very terrible happened. It was lese majeste in its most virulent form.

The offender was an American girl who committed the crime while being whirled about in McAllister's arms. "I did it! I was determined to do it! As I passed the King I dug him in the ribs with my elbow. Now I am satisfied!" "I soon disposed of the young woman," recorded her partner of the dance, "and never 'attempted her' again."

There were other eccentric Americans at large in Europe in those days besides the fair belle from Stonington. One of them, in Rome, wore a decoration that excited the curiosity of his host, the Austrian Minister. His Excellency finally found opportunity to refer to it questioningly.

"Sir!" said the American, drawing himself up, "my country is a republic. If it had been a monarchy I would have been the Duke of Pennsylvania. The order I wear is that of the Cincinnati." The Minister, deeply impressed, withdrew.

From Italy McAllister went to spend the summer at Baden-Baden. The Prince of Prussia, later the Emperor William, was there. It pained the young American to find that the royal visitor was no connoisseur, gulping his wine instead of sipping and lingering over it.

But there is haste to express intense admiration. "His habit of walking two hours under the trees of the Allee Lichtenthal was also mine, and it was with pleasure I bowed most respectfully to him day by day."

The final touch to the McAllister education came at Pau, where he passed the following winter and the winter after. He ran down to Bordeaux, made friends with all the wine fraternity there, tasted and criticised, wormed himself into the good graces of the owners of the enormous Bordeaux caves and learned there for the first time what claret was. "There I learned how to give dinners; to esteem and value the Coq de Bruyere of the Pyrenees and the Pie de Mars."

Thus equipped for the serious business of life as he conceived it, he returned home. He entertained old Commodore Vanderbilt at a dinner that caused the ex-Staten Island ferryman to remark: "My young friend, if you go on giving such dinners as these you need have no fear of planting yourself in this city."

Behold him launched, laughed at perhaps occasionally, but feared and courted. He was at the ball given to the Prince of Wales in the Academy of Music, being the first after the royal guest to take the floor for the waltz.

He devoted an entire day in railway travel in order to procure a dress suit, as he called it, in which to appear at a dinner to two English lords. He began to arrange for cotillon dinners, figuring the cost, checking off the invitations, standing at the door of the salon, naming to each man the lady he was to take in.

Gastronomically a Patriot.

There was one point to which his subserviency to British visitors would not go. Gastronomically he was as sturdy a patriot as any farmer who blazed away at the redcoats from behind the Lexington hedges. Stoutly he defended the "saddle" of venison instead of the "haunch." Our tenderloin steak was quite as good as the English rump. Of Madeira, he once said, with the spirit of Nathan Hale, "You have none to liken unto ours."

That Prince of Wales who afterward became George IV. in the vigor of his youth and the prime force of his invention produced a shoe buckle. The crowning work in the life of Ward McAllister was probably the institution of the F. C. D. C.'s, abbreviation for the Family Circle Dancing Class.

The Patriarch balls, of which the first were given in the winters of 1872 and 1873, were growing too large and were being monopolized by the married women. The new association was for the *jeune fille* and was to be limited and intimate. Its dances were held at Dodworth's, later Delmonico's, and in the foyers of the Metropolitan Opera House.

The arbiter paid the price of his greatness. "From the giving of the first to the time of my giving them up I had no peace either at home or abroad. I was assailed on all sides, became in a sense a diplomat, committed myself to nothing, promised much and performed as little as possible. . . .

Mothers Urged Him to Aid Daughters.

"My mornings were given up to being interviewed of and about them; mothers would call at my house, entirely unknown to me, the sole words of introduction being, 'Kind sir, I have a daughter.' These words were cabalistic; I would spring up, bow to the ground and reply: 'My dear madam, say no more, you have my sympathy; we are in accord; no introduction is necessary; you have a daughter and want her to go to the F. C. D. C.'s.

"'I will do all in my power to do this for you; but, my dear lady, please understand that in all matters concerning these little dances I must consult the powers that be. I am their humble servant; I must take orders from them.' All of which was a figure of speech on my part."

The arbiter would then diplomatically suggest the possibility of a friend of social influence, and make some allusion to family. That always started the fair visitor. The family always went back to King John, and, in some instances, to William the Conqueror.

"'My dear madam,' I would reply, 'does it not satisfy any one to come into existence with the birth of one's country? In my opinion, four generations of gentlemen make as good and true a gentleman as forty. I know my English brethren will not agree with me in this, but, in spite of them, it is my belief.' With disdain, my visitor would reply: 'You are easily satisfied, sir.'

"And so on, from day to day, those interviews would go on; all were Huguenots,

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